Freight rates in the country

†*64. SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:
SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that freight rates in India are higher in comparison to the freight rates of international level;

(b) if so, the facts in this regard;

(c) the average difference between these freight rates; and

(d) the main reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) The freight rates vary from country to country and time to time as they mainly depend on demand and supply position. Apart from demand and supply, the other factors which play an important role are the trade lane, the volume available, the tonnage available, the services rendered, prevailing market conditions, bunker prices, port charges etc. The following examples will illustrate variation in freight rates at a given point of time:

Sl. No.	Trade Lane with rates of freight per twenty feet equivalent unit (TEU)		Reasons for Variation
1.	Hamburg to India USD 550 to 600	India to Hamburg USD 950	Cargo volume available from India to Europe (Hamburg) are much higher than what are available from Europe to India.
2.	China (Shanghai) to India USD 950-1000	India to China (Shanghai) USD 350-400	Cargo volume from China to India are higher. Most of the carriers use the India-Shanghai leg for repositioning empty containers for import cargo into India.
3.	India to New York USD 650 to 1100	New York to India USD 200 to 300	Mostly, Shipping Lines reposition empty containers back to India.
4.	Europe to US USD 850 to 875	US to Europe USD 275 to 300	Cargo volume available from Europe to US are much higher than what are available from US to Europe.

(c) The average difference between the freight rates vary from time to time.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) The main reason for this variation is the supply and demand of ships and available volume of cargo.

Missing of blank passport booklets

*65. SHRI MOTIUR RAHMAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether thousands of blank passport booklets and visa stickers were found missing from Missions and Posts abroad and if so, the details thereof;

(b) whether a well-oiled racket, involving the local police and passport offices issuing fake passports to foreign nationals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka exists;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) the corrective measures taken to check malpractices and deficiencies in passport offices; and

(e) the action taken against the officials responsible for issuing fake passports to foreign nationals and for loss of blank passport booklets and visa stickers?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Some blank passport booklets and visa stickers supplied to a few Indian Missions/Posts abroad were not accounted for as mentioned in the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the Performance audit of Passport, Visa and Consular Services covering the period 2000-01 to 2004-05. However, most of these documents were subsequently accounted for and details are given in the Statement-I (*See* below).

(b) and (c) While the Government have not come across any organised racket, a few cases have come to its notice, where Indian passports were issued by Passport Offices on the basis of forged documents to the nationals of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and details are given in Statement-II (*See* below).

(d) Government have taken several corrective measures to check malpractices and deficiencies in Passport Offices. These include regular and surprise inspections, including vigilance inspections of Passport Offices, strengthening vigilance mechanisms in the Central Passport Organisation and ensuring greater accountability in the working of Passport Offices. Government have also initiated steps to introduce biometric passports.

(e) Government have taken action against errant officials by sanctioning prosecution by the concerned agencies or through disciplinary proceedings, as required. Steps have also been taken to ensure the safety of documents during their movement from the India Security Press, Nasik to end-users and for proper accounting of such documents.